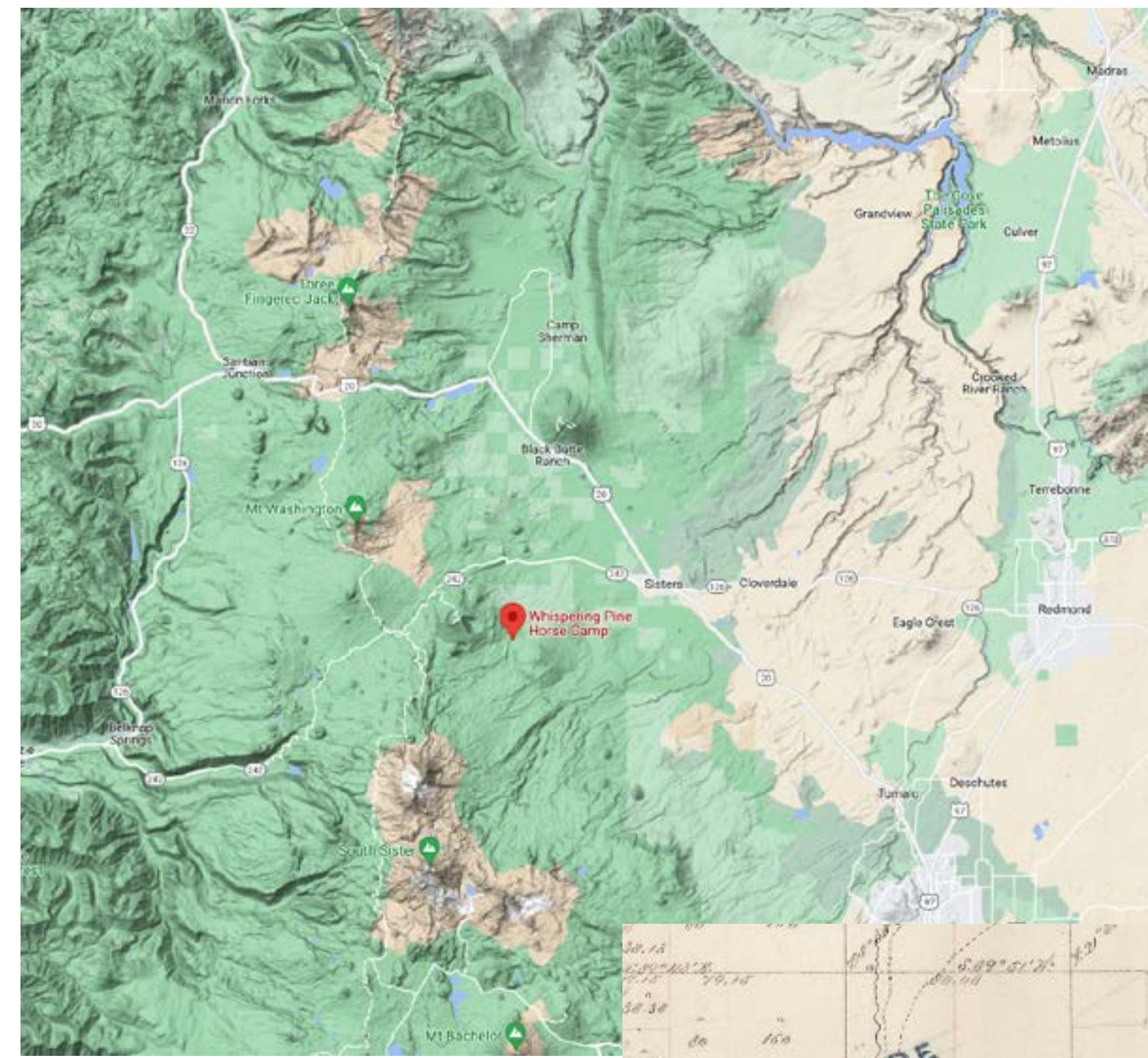


Reinterpreting Indigenous Contributions to the 1855 Pacific Railroad Survey at One of Oregon's Newest Heritage Trees

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The Location:
An upland forest camp at the confluence of multiple Indigenous trails.



The tree is located in the Whispering Pine Horse Camp, 10.4 miles southwest of Sisters, Or in the Deschutes National Forest.

The tree is located in a mature Ponderosa Pine *Pinus Ponderosa* forest and estimated to be 300 years old. An 1870 GLO map indicates the site was at the confluence of the "McKenzie Trail" (East-West) and "Warm Springs-Klamath Trail" (North-South).

Ethnographically these upland areas may have been utilized by multiple indigenous groups for resource gathering, trade, and forging kinship ties with other groups (Zenk and Riggsby 1998).

The Tree:
A 300 year old Ponderosa in a mature stand adjacent to a meadow



In the 1940s, an amateur historian documented a blaze with Lt. Philip H. Sheridan's name and date on the tree, allegedly left by Sheridan who as a member of the Williamson-Abbot Expedition of 1855 (Williams 1983). Today, most of the blaze has sealed over, and the official report makes no mention of Sheridan carving his name into the tree.

Above Williamson-Abbot Expedition Tree (summer 2021) and official Heritage Tree plaque that will be installed at the site.



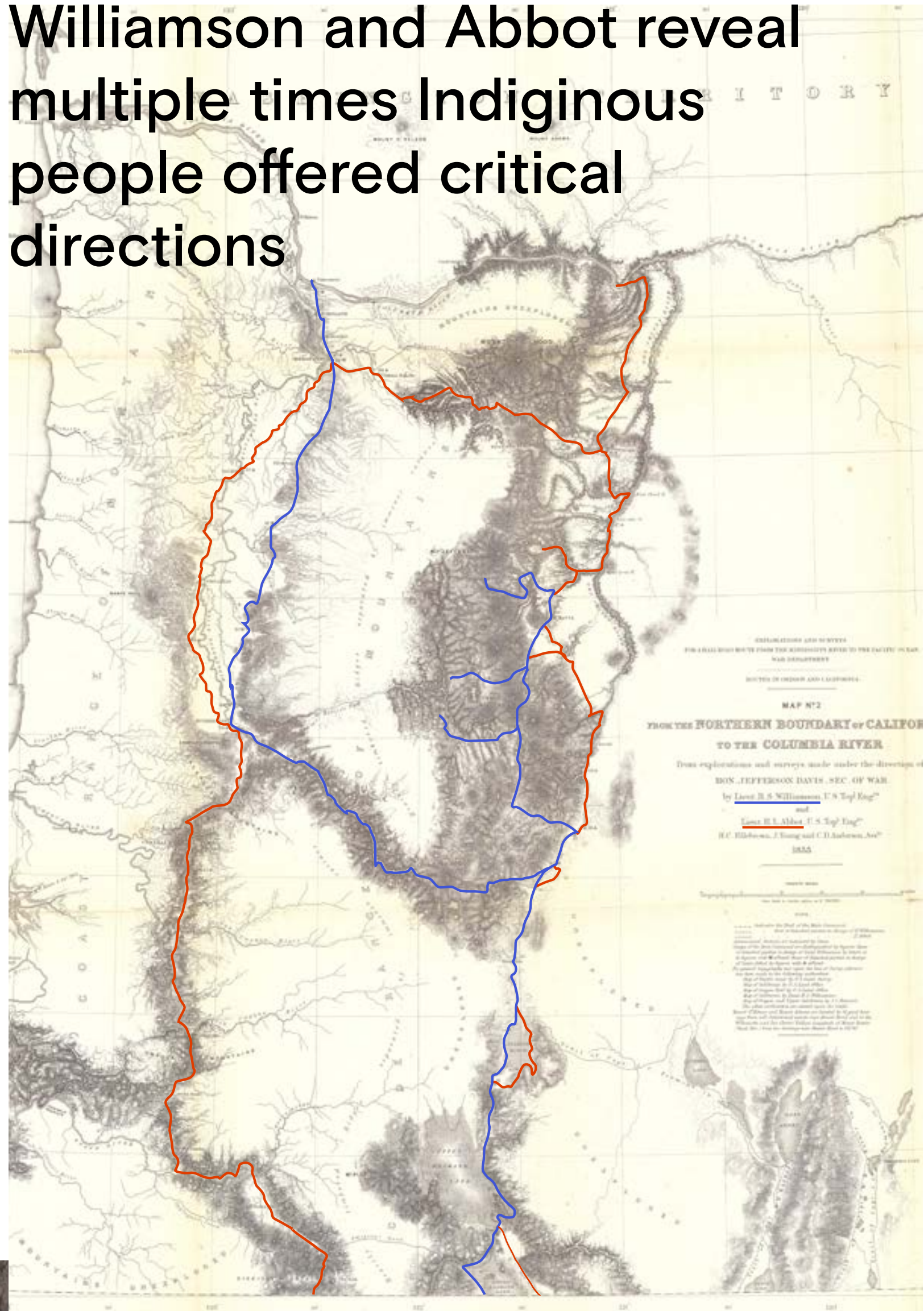
Sept. 1 1855
"we resumed our march on the trail. We soon overtook two mounted Indians... He spoke a little Chinook, and gave us to understand that the trail soon forked—one branch going to the Dalles, the other to the Willamette valley. About nine miles from camp we reached the forks." – Lt. Robert Williamson, Official Report 1855.

Left illustration of native people offering directions to Camp 40 (Whispering pine) from the Official Report.



Scan to play video

The Official Report:
Williamson and Abbot reveal multiple times Indigenous people offered critical directions



Above Routes of Williamson and Abbot's survey in Oregon
Left Lt. Philip Henry Sheridan
Far Left scar on tree attributed to Sheridan

Interpreting the story through video:
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Abstract:

An early scientific survey in the Pacific Northwest, the U.S. Pacific Railroad Survey of 1855 not only charted the feasibility of railroad routes over Oregon's Cascade mountains but also cataloged the geology, flora, fauna and interactions with Indigenous peoples of the region. The expedition and its official report furthered the United States' pursuit of empire and conquest of the west and led to an exaggerated characterization of the American scientists as conquering heroes. Like most of these euro-american expeditions, Indigenous people offered critical information, hospitality, goods, and services to the explorers. Seldom are these Indigenous people credited or named—both in official reports and in historical interpretations. However, a growing body of ethnohistorical scholarship aims to recenter Indigenous contributions to these expeditions by offering a critical reading of the information in these historical scientific reports and crafting a contextualized interpretation with archeological and ethnographic sources.

In 2021 the Oregon Heritage Tree Program, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, listed a Ponderosa Pine that was blazed by one of the members of the 1855 expedition in its registry. Seeking a fuller historical interpretation of the expedition, and the tree, a careful analysis of historical documents revealed multiple unnamed Indigenous people that guided the expedition through the Cascades and along pre existing Indigenous trails. Through an official plaque at the tree and a short documentary film, a reinterpretation of the expedition and the tree reveals this deeper history to the public.

For more information on Oregon Heritage Trees visit oregontic.com/oregon-heritage-trees/

Conclusion:

A close analysis of demonstrates that the expedition and Sheridan were present in the camp for a few days in September of 1855. However, the reports leave no indication that Sheridan blazed the tree. Further analysis of the scar via tomography may yield further information.

- The larger landscape contains multiple references to members of the expedition:
- Williamson (mountain, river, and Williamson's Spruce, a common name for Western hemlock *Tsuga heterophylla*)
 - Abbot (former military camp near Sunriver)
 - Sheridan (mountain near Lava Lake and a town in Yamhill county)
 - Dr. J.S. Newberry (Newberry Crater, and Newberry's Penstemon *Penstemon newberryi*).

While the official report discloses that multiple native people led and offered critical knowledge to the expedition, these individuals are nearly all unnamed. With the possibility that this area and landscape were part of a much larger upland resource and trade system, the Oregon Heritage Tree Committee felt it was important to shift the significance of the tree away from Sheridan and toward Indigenous involvement in the history and stewardship of this mature forest.

Future archaeological research in the area may shed more light on the cultural context for this site.

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